Analyzing Tone

TONE is defined as the writer's or speaker's attitude toward the subject and audience.  In speech one uses inflection and even gestures to convey a certain attitude.  Understanding tone in prose and poetry is more difficult.  A reader must rely on a knowledge and understanding of word choice, details, and imagery to accurately interpret a writer's purpose.  To misinterpret tone is to misinterpret meaning.  If a reader misses irony or sarcasm, s/he may find something serious in a piece intended to be humorous.

TONE VOCABULARY LIST:  Below is a list of words that can be used to describe an author's tone.  Note subtle differences between related terms.   
 

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| angry | sad | sentimental | sharp | cold |
| fanciful | upset | complimentary | urgent | silly |
| joking | boring | condescending | poignant | afraid |
| detached | happy | sympathetic | confused | apologetic |
| hollow | childish | contemptuous | joyful | peaceful |
| allusive | mocking | humorous | sweet | objective |
| vexed | vibrant | horrific | sarcastic | nostalgic |
| tired | frivolous | irreverent | zealous | bitter |
| audacious | benevolent | dreamy | shocking | seductive |
| restrained | somber | candid | proud | giddy |
| pitiful | dramatic | provocative | didactic | others? |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Analyzing TONE requires an evaluation of specific elements in a piece of writing.  Use the following acronym to help you remember the basics:  DIDLS

Diction      the connotation of the word choice   
Images      vivid appeals to understanding through the senses   
Details      facts that are included or those omitted   
Language   the overall use of language, such as formal, clinical, jargon...   
Sentence  how structure affects the reader's attitude   
    
  Adapted from *A Guide for AP English Vertical Teams* published by The College Board